
Interview

Recently I had the opportunity to interview V. David who grew up in northeast India. He was the only child in a well-to-do Brahmin family that owned a large brick-making business. During his youth he was able to receive a good education and while attending the university he earned a degree in commerce and then a MBA. After his studies he worked for the family business and picked up several bad habits including drinking, smoking, and driving cars in a fast, reckless way around town. In the interview I asked him a few questions about his journey to faith and his present work.

Bruce Bauer (BB): What were some of the circumstances that started you on your journey of faith from Hinduism to Christianity?

It really started when I was in my twenties working for the family business. There was an Orthodox Church Father who purchased a lot of bricks from our family business since he was also in charge of several building projects for that church. He talked with me and got to know me. He noticed that I had a drinking and smoking problem and talked with me about it, but I told him I couldn't stop. He encouraged me to ask Jesus to give me power to stop.

The real turning point came when one day I faced a very bad business situation. I had promised several of our vendors that I would pay them the next day, but didn't have the money. The Orthodox Father had often encouraged me to pray to Jesus if I needed help, but I had never done it. I was desperate, so I prayed that Jesus would help me get the money. I usually closed the business at 6:00 in the evening, but for some reason I was still working at eight o'clock.

I received a phone call and a man asked if he could come over right then to talk about buying some bricks. I said sure, and he turned out to be a contractor hired by the government who wanted our company to pro-

vide a huge order of bricks for a construction job. We dickered over the price and soon reached an agreed on price. As he was leaving, he asked if I needed a deposit or a cash advance on the work. I said no, but he insisted and gave me the exact amount of money that I needed to pay our vendors the next day.

I was so excited I called the Father and told him what had happened. He asked, "Did you pray to Jesus?" When I told him I had he too joined in my shocked happiness. That was the beginning.

BB: *What happened next?*

Somehow I found my mind being drawn to this Jesus. This was so different from the Hindu way where God is not personally involved. The Father came right over that same night and brought me a New Testament. After receiving the Bible I started to read various passages. The priest had also told me that even though I was searching for Jesus, Jesus was also searching for me. He told me to read the first gospel and then he would explain things if I didn't understand them. He also invited me to church. The next day I visited him and asked him to explain who Adam was, and all the other names mentioned in Mathew's Gospel. He told me to skip those first two chapters, and then later encouraged me to start from chapter 5.

I started attending the church and met him whenever I didn't understand things, at which time he would explain them to me. He also continued to visit me from time to time at the business. After attending church every Sunday for about six months I requested baptism, since I couldn't partake of the weekly communion if I had not yet been baptized. After I asked for baptism he started teaching me the doctrines of the Orthodox Church, which primarily consisted of information about the many saints of the church. However, this priest had been a Pentecostal pastor before joining the Orthodox Church so he did stress the importance of reading the Bible instead of spending a lot of time to teach me about all the saints of the church.

After I got baptized, Father Michael and his wife invited me to his home for dinner, at which time I noticed his young daughter, Swarna. We discussed what I thought about Christianity and they told me how happy they were to have me in church—this was the beginning of a beautiful relationship with that family. One evening about three months later Father Michael told me a lot about Swarna, then shocked me by saying that the family had prayed a lot about this thing and they had come to the conclusion that I should marry their daughter. I asked if they had discussed this with their daughter, and he assured me that she said she had no problem.

So I asked if I could talk with Swarna, so he invited me to dinner again and encourage me to come to the house a little early.

I told Swarna I was from a Brahmin family, so my family would not accept her. I said I didn't have any problem in marrying her, but I left it up to her whether or not to marry. She said she would leave it up to her father and told me that if I agreed we could marry. She also told me that the family had fasted and prayed and all had agreed that I was the one for Swarna. I told her I needed at least 15 days to decide.

The next week I didn't go to church since I was struggling with several things. First, I hadn't told my family that I was a Christian and now I was contemplating marrying someone who was not a Brahmin—two huge steps that went directly against our cultural practices.

Finally I went to my mother and told her I was a Christian. As soon as I said that she started crying loudly just like someone cries when they lose a son or father in death. Then when I told her I was going to marry a Christian woman, my mom became speechless. She was shocked that I would make these two decisions alone. She asked what would happen to the family—I was the only son—how would the family traditions be carried out. Mom said, "don't tell your father, he might kill you," so I didn't tell my dad anything.

I knew I would not receive permission to marry Swarna, but I felt better that I had told my mother. Mom cried, and then I left. I went back to Swarna's family, told them I was ready to marry their daughter, that I would be starting my life anew since I was sure I would lose my house, business, family, and inheritance. But Swarna's family encouraged us to go ahead and get married and promised to provide a place to live, some money to get started, and support since they also knew that I would be cut off from my family.

When my family found out that I had married, my aunt came and took over the family business I had been running. I gave back to my family everything, even my personal bank account. However, my father said that I had served the business well for three years, so he calculated that I deserved a sum of money that was then placed in my bank account. My uncle said that my father had ordered it to be given to me, but I returned it.

BB:What happened next?

I went to the Orthodox seminary for one and a half years in Kerala State to study to become a catechist. This was a very hard time for me since I had to go there alone and leave my wife with her family. There was no spiritual side to the training—all the focus was on learning the history of the saints plus a little Greek. When I finished I was ordained as a cate-

chist for one district, but soon they gave me five districts. It was about that time that my father-in-law had a massive heart attack and died, and that coupled with massive internal problems in the church led to the collapse of the Orthodox Church structure for much of India. There were internal political problems between various church leaders and infighting between various factions. As a result funding stopped and salaries stopped being paid to many church workers so things really collapsed.

I didn't have money to pay for transport to visit the church members, so Swarna and I spent the time reading the Bible. As we studied we found the seventh day and found that the seventh day was not Sunday. We became convinced that the seventh day was an important day in Scripture so Swarna suggested we ask the Greek Father about it. He said the seventh day was kept by the Jews and some other crazy people (Seventh-day Adventists) but since Jesus was resurrected on Sunday we kept that day. Swarna and I were not satisfied, so we continued to read the Bible to find answers to our questions, but we didn't find what we were looking for. Swarna suggested that we should fast and pray that God would show us what to do. So we fasted during the daylight hours—like Muslims—for three days.

An Indian Father saw us praying in the church and heard us praying about the seventh day. He told us that he knew one church in Calcutta that kept the seventh day and told me where to find it. So immediately I left for Calcutta even though it was a three hour trip and it was already 5 p.m. I arrived at 8 p.m. on a Friday evening and found people at the church for vespers. After the vespers was finished I went up to the pastor and started to tell him about my interest in the seventh day, but there were two other visitors—one from Australia and the other from Kenya—who were also waiting to speak to the pastor and he seemed impatient for me to stop talking so he could talk with the visitors. It turned out that those two men were more interested in me than the pastor was, so the two visitors asked if they could visit me on Sunday. I said sure, and gave them directions to the Orthodox Church. I returned home that Friday night and then was surprised when the two men came early Sunday morning. Since I was in charge of the church service that day, I introduced my two friends and also told the church members about my search for the meaning of the seventh day. The Kenyan man was very enthusiastic about what he had heard, so after lunch he taught me about the Sabbath from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Many members also stayed to hear this message and after several hours they asked why the church didn't offer this kind of Bible teaching. When we asked the Kenyan man to stay, he agreed to teach us for the next week.

After three days the Greek Father returned and blocked further teaching in the church so we decided to rent a hall and invited John Mellic, the

Australia, and Jim Yodo, the Kenyan, to stay. The studies continued for the rest of the week in a rented hall, but when the Greek Father came to know about the meetings he fired me. I was now free so do whatever I thought needed to be done so I called the members and we continued to meet in a community hall. Within a few months I and 140 members all became Seventh-day Adventists. Two years later I was hired to pastor the group.

BB: *Let's back up a bit in the story. What were some of the most difficult things for you when you moved from Hinduism to Christianity?*

The most difficult thing was food—the Orthodox Christians ate everything—snake, beef, pork, all kinds of meat—which was very shocking to me with my Brahmin background of vegetarianism. I really had culture shock.

BB: *Is V. David the name you were born with?*

No, my Brahmin name was a normal Indian name.

BB: *How and why did you get this new name?*

When I got baptized I was given the name V. David. I had no choice in the matter, could not even choose a new Christian name since they just told me what my name was. I found out later that my name was given on the basis of the calendar—David was the name for Christians baptized on that particular day.

BB: *Was this an advantage for you in the Hindu society, or a disadvantage?*

It was a huge disadvantage since a Christian name means that I was now viewed as the lowest of the caste groups. I was now treated as a tribal person. So I went from the highest caste to the lowest caste because of that name change.

BB: *What did that do when you wanted to meet upper caste people?*

As soon as I would mention my name as V. David, I would meet opposition and the people would not be willing to talk about spiritual things. They felt that it was impossible for a low caste person to know anything about spiritual matters.

BB: *So have you ever gone back and used your original name?*

Yes, now when I meet Hindus I always use my original name. I even use it when I meet Hindus who know that I became a Christian. I tell them that I am happy to continue to use my old name but that I have gained spiritual benefits from being with Christians. This causes many to become curious as to what benefit Christianity could offer. As I talk with them, many of my former Hindu friends soon realize that I have a higher level of spirituality than they do. They are especially interested in last day things and worried about karma. They know that they have both bad karma and good karma, and that they will never have enough good karma to move forward. So they have no hope for the future. Hinduism has no offer of hope—everything depends completely on what each person does.

BB: When you meet Hindus what approach do you use to begin to introduce them to Jesus Christ?

I try to direct the conversation so that I can find out what their personal needs are. If they mention that they cannot overcome some bad habit, I give them suggestions on how Jesus can help them or I share the miracles of Jesus to show that Jesus can solve their problems. I tell what Jesus did when he was on this earth, how his disciples did the same, and how that same power is available to them today.

BB: Can you tell me a story that illustrates this?

I went to my friend's house one day and his 14 year old son had been experiencing mental problems for three years since he was 11 years old. I didn't know if it was really a mental problem or some demonic problem. I knew that regardless of what it was Jesus could do something. The whole family was discouraged because of this situation. During that first visit my friend asked me if I knew of any good psychiatric doctors or good hospitals that could help his son. Since I was from Calcutta I said yes, but then I shared a story of how Jesus had healed another friend's wife who had a mental problem. This family had tried all kinds of things for three years; they had visited many doctors, and had received no help. So, when I said that my friend's wife had been healed they jumped on that; they were excited and wanted to know how the wife was healed. I told them that we had prayed and God had healed her. They cried and said, "Why haven't you done the same thing for our son?" I prayed for them, and then shared the story with the people in my church and asked them all to pray for the boy. About fifteen days later I visited the home again and the family said that the boy's behavior was changing. I also could see a little change, so we continued to pray. After two months the boy returned to normal. He was

healed with no medicine and with no consultation with any doctors—just Jesus and prayer.

The couple wanted to know more about Jesus. They told their close friends and relatives and gave their testimony as to how Jesus had healed their son. They started studying the Bible and invited ten other people to join that group—five couples who were all Brahmin—to study about the Jesus who had healed their son.

BB: *In Hindu society there are people who are known to possess power to deal with evil spirits. Did this couple think that you had that kind of power?*

Yes.

BB: *So what did you do?*

I told them that the power did come from a Spirit, but not the same spirit that Hindu people go to for help. The power came from Jesus and a Holy Spirit. They also saw the difference because Hindus who seek help from the Hindu spirits have to go through a lot of rituals, do sacrifices, and still often there is no help. But the healing of their son was done in a very different way that was quiet with no rituals or sacrifices. They clearly saw the difference.

BB: *What was the next step for those couples?*

After they saw the healing they wanted to know more about Jesus and the Bible. I told them that if they wanted to know more they would have to read more, so each couple took a Bible. I showed them where to start and how to study and asked a Bible worker to study with them. The interesting thing is that it was an act of the Holy Spirit that opened their minds to be interested in studying about Jesus.

BB: *Do you have other instances where God did something to help people become interested in knowing about Jesus?*

Yes, there are many. For example, in July of 2012 I met one of my old Hindu friends who I had not seen in over ten years. I visited him in his house and he told me he was teaching school. He was very happy to see me and since he knew I had become a Christian he had a lot of questions about my new religion. I told him that I had gained a lot of spiritual benefits from being a Christian so he asked me what was good for me in my new religion.

I told him that if I was the same as before that I would have already asked him for an alcoholic drink and cigarettes. He wanted to know how I had changed, how I had stopped smoking. When he had known me before I was a chain smoker so he wanted to know how I had stopped. I told him that I received the power from the new religion, from Jesus, to overcome the habits through God's power. When his wife heard this—she had a smoke allergy and often fought and argued with her husband when he drank—the wife became more interested in what I was saying than her husband. The wife asked me, "How can we know about this religion." I told them that I could come and study with them, but I also gave them a New Testament and told them to begin reading in the book of Mark.

After I left their home that night there was a big fight between the husband and wife because he wanted to throw the Bible out of the house, but the wife said, "No, you know that your friend changed because of this book." The next morning I got a phone call from my friend telling me that something strange had happened after I left—they had a big fight but had finally calmed down and went to bed. In the middle of the night the man had a dream. In the dream he didn't know why, but he knew it was Jesus who asked him not to fight with his wife over the book and to read the book. Immediately he woke his wife up and started telling her that he had just had a dream, but she interrupted him and said she also had just had a dream in which Jesus told her not to worry that Jesus would also tell her husband to read the book with her.

As I listened to my friend, I asked to speak to his wife. I wanted to hear her side of the story since I believed her more than my friend. When he gave the phone to his wife she was crying, and said, "Something happened to my family—both of us have seen Jesus and have been encouraged to read the Bible. We have already finished reading five chapters of Mark. We don't understand everything we are reading, but it is a very nice book, so can you help us understand what we are reading." I agreed to send a person to help them. They studied and the family became strong believers and have already started eleven small groups with 8-12 members in each group.

It is very common in India for the Holy Spirit to heal a person or to give a dream as the first step in leading a person or family to Jesus Christ. I guess that is a lot like what happened in the Book of Acts.